Wendy: This is Wendy Chapkis, W-E-N-D-Y C-H-A-P-K-I-S interviewing Peter Prizer on June 13th, 2019. And Peter could you say and spell your name?

Peter: Peter Prizer, P-E-T-E-R P-R-I-Z-E-R.

Wendy: And Peter as I said to you before we turned on the tape recorder, and I'll say it again, is you are in control of this interview. So if there is anything that I ask, you don't want to talk about, you can just say you don't want to talk about that, or if you would like to stop at any point we can stop. So really, you're in the driver's seat here.

Wendy: So first can you tell me a little bit, uh, just first where you were born and grew up and how long you've lived in Maine, that kind of basic biographical stuff?

Peter: Thank you Wendy, and just as a dislaimer at the get-go, when I say "gay," that's what we used back in the day, so rather than go "LGBTQT+" I'm just gonna say gay, and that'll be short hand for everything. Um, thank you. I was born in, I'm 71, this year. I was born uh, outside of Philly in a middle, upper-middle class suburb. My father was a school teacher, um, Mom was a classic stay-at-home mom. My father made $5,000 teaching at this very upscale prep-school, all boys. Segregated, by the way, back then. Um, so, my older brother, and I, could go free. But we were very, we were barely in the middle of middle-class as far as income and all that. But I grew up in an area that was much more upscale than we were, and much more wealthy. But I didn't care, I didn't really notice. My father's mother had a little money, she would shoot him a few bucks now and then. We did stuff, but we, we were, we never had a car or anything. I was the middle kid, older brother, very straight. Younger sister, she is also heterosexual. Um, and I went to this school, and the reason I mention it, I'm not going to tell you the name, uh, to spare the embarrassment. And uh, I got a really good education, for one thing. Which helped me later when it camed to working on Mainely Gay the newsletter, I knew how to spell words. [laughter] Um, also, and this is even more important, Um, I went through twelve hellish years. Starting in kindergarten so it was probably thirteen, um, years at this prep school with truly, the sons of the ruling class, you know. This is where they went, it was one of maybe three or four prep schools in the Philly area. So, I learned, very early, how to deal with people who had sort of a natural "hottie" way about them. Not even thinking they were, and that helped me too, later in life. I am rarely intimidated by someone, I was like, you know, I was like kicking their ass, their sons, you know what I mean? In school, and um, getting along, I sort of saw how they ticked. And basically they were just like me. But that was, you know, CEO of some fortune five hundred, and you know, commuted into Philly, that kind of thing. So that was, that was my formative education. I graduated in '67, um, Vietnam War at the time, was starting to really pick up. Uh, I decided, there's just no way I'm going to get a rifle and kill somebody. I knew that, but, I thought well, "it might be over by 1970" [laughter], and uh, I am embarrassed, I took advantage of student deferments and I went to Penn State. Just to give you an idea of the school, I was the only kid out of the class of 70 that went to the state university. Everybody else: Princeton, Yale, Stanford, Harvard, and so there I was at Penn State, typical, kid, uh, although I was a secret

fag. I was pretty good at hiding it, I think. Um, no one ever came up to me later and said "ugh, we knew" and if they did, they didn't tell me.

Wendy: When did you know?

Peter: Around 12 or 13, I started noticing you know, I really kind of like boys better than, well not better than, well actually all of my friends, through all of my life have been females. And I prefer the company of females, to this day. With a few major major major exceptions. And my friends here in Maine, are who you know, the men, are exceptions. Anyway, I knew when I was 13 but I didn't come out until my early twenties. I just kept it to myself, but it had a debilitating effect on how I viewed the future. 'Cause, back in the late sixties, you know, they assumed you probably have a family, and be the dad, and all this. And I knew I didn't want to do that. I didn't rebel, I just knew I wasn't going to do it. And so it kind of made me somewhat estranged in my head from the larger culture and even estranged from good friends who had no idea about me, and they would, you know, guys would talk about their dates, women dates. You know and they wanna ask me "who are you seeing?" you know and I would kind of get out of it. But, um, so I was at Penn State and again, the family I grew up in was fairly dysfunctional like all of our families, but not to a glaring degree. You know I can't say I was traumatized or anything like this. I grew up, I mean I remember when I was twelve years old looking at T.V. and so naive, I thought, "I wonder if people in New York City can pick up the Philly T.V. stations, or do they not have T.V.?" You know, that's how, anyway. I had no activism in high school. I wasn't even anti-war. And uh, I got to Penn State, everything changed. I met peers who were activists and who were anti-war and I started hanging out with them because I liked their energy and what they had to say made sense. So I got, I became an anti-war activist as a student, very easy to do, you can do anything when you're a student as long as your dad is giving you a check now and then. I was getting a modest one [laughter]. But anyway, also I need to say too, around seventeen, I had my first beer. Turned into a horrible, horrible, alcoholic, but functioning. And that's my, that's sort of the uh filter that one would need to look through to see how my life unfolded for the next ten, fifteen, fifteen years anyway. Um, well, so here I am at Penn State and I got involved with SDS, I wasn't a member but I'd go to their demos, and uh, there were many. My favorite demonstration at state college, PA, they were going to cut down all of these Elm trees, and widen the main drag. And uh, we were kind of "pro-tree" or probably "anti-widening" if the truth were known. But we climbed up in the trees. That was my first kind of civil disobedient act and of the T.V. crews came from Pittsburgh and Philly to see these idiots up in the trees. And God we were there for weeks. So college ended, we came back after summer break, and guess what? Eight lanes going into the... So that was my, that was my introduction. But I always felt in the back of my mind, that this is, that I'm glad to be anti-war I'm glad to be pro-environment but I'm not doing anything that directly affects me. There was no gay rights. If you really dug deeply you could find these groups in New York and Philly and they were very conservative by today's standards.

Wendy: So this was the late 1960s?

Peter: Yeah, this is '68, '69 now. I only lasted two years at Penn State. And I thought, you know what? I think my drinking is more important to me, so I'm going to go where I can drink in peace, and I'm going to Maine. [laughter]

Wendy: Why Maine? How do you-

Peter: Okay, well now I have to back up a second, [00:10:33.20] my father, he was not only a school teacher, but, uh, he got some money from his mother again, bought some land, and this was really cheap to do back in the mid-fifties, bought some lovely land, uh, on Damariscotta Lake, in Jefferson, Maine, and started a boys' camp called Chimney Point. It was a point of land, and there had been a house with a chimney and the house had burned down, this chimney is sitting there all by itself and the locals called the area Chimney Point. And then my father came, bought the land, and built a nice lodge around the existing chimney, and, so, um, that operated for maybe fifteen years. I was probably seven when it, the first summer, and I was there all through my, almost, I think twenty years old, it was the last summer there. But, I was exposed to Maine, and I was exposed to Maine from June to September, and I had this kind of idea, you know, that "oh my God, this is an unexplored tropical paradise" and of course I was drinking and my judgement was impaired so I thought "oh, I'll go to Maine, and you know, kick back." So, I moved to Maine in the early seventies, I left Penn State um, I instantly lost my student deferment, but, uh, I had gotten over weight from the beer. I drank so much that my blood pressure was too high. I actually got called up, I was in the first draft lottery, my number was three hundred and I thought "oh they'll never call me." Well they did call me for the pre-induction physical which is a-whole-nother interview which is really funny, but I end up being a 1Y deferment, like, our president, I think he got a 1Y for his bone spurs, and I got mine for high blood pressure. In other words, national emergency only, well that's okay with me. And-

Wendy: Can I just ask, did it occur to you to come out at all during your interview?

Peter: Oh yes, oh yeah yeah, but so was everybody else, you know, and it worked in the late sixites, you could say you were a homosexual and "huh!" then you were almost ushered to the door at that point during your pre-induction. But everybody started doing it, and so uh, the guy just yawned and checked the box and uh, [laughter] what really got their eye though, I thought "well that didn't really make an impression," so the next thing I had to fill out was "subversive groups" okay, that I was a member of. And they had listed for our benefit, maybe twenty typical "mothers against imperialism" I had no idea what they were, I checked 'em all, okay [laughter]. When it came time to pick up my papers again, this was in Philly, it was a whole day long experience, you had to pick up your papers and take them somewhere. I went to the table, I said "I need my papers" and the guy says "oh, you're a subversive!" And so, I didn't need to do it. And I said "fine, see ya later" and I was gone. I had to come, I was living in Maine at the time and my draft board was in Media, PA, and uh, so I went back to Maine and that was the end of my, uh, I did bear my draft card at Penn State. Not on film, but as a demo. And that was about it, um, and I got a job um, working on a waterfront, in the early seventies, seventy-one?

Wendy: Which, where in...?

Peter: Portland.

Wendy: Portland!

Peter: I'm sorry Wendy, in Portland. Portland Pier actually, at the very end. And I worked there for gosh, six or seven years. And I, uh, did everything to do with lobsters. I picked them up, I can pick up a lobster right now and tell you whether it's a one pound, one and an eighth, two ounces. One and a quarter, one and a half, and [laughter] that's my gift from being there seven years. And I drove the truck, went all up and down the coast. Washington county down to York. It was a job you could drink at, because on the waterfront, you may be a drunk but guess what? There's a worse drunk two feet away, and the same with that person, you know. And so, I had to kind of put up with it. And I was either hungover, I never drank on the job, but I was always hungover at work. By one o'clock I kind of shook it off and couldn't wait till four o'clock to come around and go back, and anyway, so that was what I did and I was not happy but I wasn't unhappy. Um, it was a full time job and I lived in a, you get an apartment on State Street for eighty dollars a month back then. Lower State Street, and I had a, you know, this was metaphoric of my life. I bought one of the first pintos [laughter] and it was baby puke green. That was how everyone described it at first sight, even not being prompted and that kind of fit me a little bit. So the point was, this was the car I drove around all over Maine, and once my activism kicked in.

Wendy: So can I ask, did you have a community when you moved to Portland? Did you develop one?

Peter: No.

Wendy: You didn't?

Peter: No, I had a couple friends who were friends with my sister who was living in Portland at the time. She uh, had gone to BU, and then she came up to Portland afterwards and she had a, she was going to Westbrook college and a couple of her female friends would come over to the apartment and you know I was still in the closet. So they would see me and you know, like many "preppy" I hate to say that, it's a horrible confession. Like many preppy influenced boys, we can be charming when we want to. You know, and we can be real dicks when we want to, also. And I was always taught to be nice, my parents did bring me up well, or so I think. And so, I was, women liked me, and I liked that. I would secretly come out to them when it came to a point where "okay Peter you got to do something here." So, that was it. I had a very tiny, I didn't know any gay guys. Um, I knew of other gay guys, but they were miles away in New York, you know, people making news. I vaguely had heard about Stonewall, um, but as far as I could tell, there was not much going on in Maine in '71. Now around that time alternative newspapers started appearing, and one was the Boston Phoenix. And you could do a personal, so I thought "oooh,

this is cool" so I wrote a personal ad, fake first name, of course. I actually met three or four guys from Eastern Massachusetts you know, they drive up, and based on what I wrote they are pretty hot to get here to see me, you know, and they get here and they're like "oh, Jesus." That was my first, kind of, uh, messing around with who I was. It never went anywhere, probably just as well for both parties. Then in 1973, I think it was, there had been a group that formed in Brunswick and I think it was called the Brunswick Gay Women's Group, and they had guys in there, Stan Fortuna, Steven Leo, notably. And the women I remember was Susan Ashley, uh, Wendy Ashley, pardon me, Susan Breeding, um, and they had straight ally women. It was a really nice group that I later found out. Anyway, uh, they were kind of a novelty at the time and somehow, I believe, they got an invitation to speak to Bowdoin college students on the campus and I saw in the paper that there was a little blurb, "gays to speak" [laughter] something, "gays to speak," and uh, I thought "oh shit, there's my kind," and uh, it was like a Tuesday night or something, so, winter too, it had gotten, it was like seven o'clock at the auditorium, and I wasn't drinking for this. I got up there and I was a little nervous, even, you know. They didn't let anybody in the auditorium, you had to be a student, and I was sitting next to these three guys, they were obviously Bowdoin students, they were my age, maybe a little younger. And here on the stage are Wendy, Susan, Stan, Steven, and maybe one or two others who I can't remember, they were there. The festivities kicked off, and right away there was a hostility in the room. Now, today, I should go back to Bowdoin college and say "hey, you need to atone," you know [laughter], but back then it was like totally cool for you know, intelligent, privileged boys to be homophobic and proud. I was sitting there and it went on, you know the speakers on stage you know gave their, whatever they did, I can't remember, and I'm sitting next to these guys and I can hear their comments and they were saying "faggots" under their breath to each other, and one guy actually nudges me in the ribs and says "look at those fags" you know, I couldn't take any longer, and I was like a zombie. I just got up and, there was an empty chair, I just got up and sat down next to the, people, it sounds dramatic and staged, but I just had enough. And so, it was actually presumptuous as hell.

Wendy: You got up on the stage?

Peter: Yeah! And they didn't know who the hell I was, you know, today they probably would have pat me down but then they just figured I was a kindred spirit which I was, and I didn't know what to say. And no one fortunately asked me any questions. And anyway-

Wendy: But what a profound act of solidarity.

Peter: I had forgotten about that until Stan reminded me just a couple months ago. Anyway, I didn't see it, I never saw it, it was, again it was more, I acted more out of irritation than out of bravery. Um, but, it was a great introduction [laughter] and so, suddenly, suddenly, here is this wonderful group of people that I didn't know existed, so that got the ball rolling. So for the first time in my life, I must have been twenty-four, twenty-three, for the first time in my life I kind of outed myself to the people there, anyway. First time in my life I felt I was standing up for my own

values and that I liked so that's pretty much how things, how the ball got rolling, I drove many many times to Brunswick after that, and the rest, as they say, is history.

Wendy: Can you talk a little bit about early activities or activism that you did with that group? Or socializing?

Peter: The first thing I remember doing, and this is really cool, we picketed the Stowe house, and you've probably heard this in other interviews, the Stowe house where Harry Beacher Stowe wrote her famous book, Lincoln jokingly accused her of starting the war [laughter] Uncle Tom's Cabin, of course, had been turned into a somewhat upscale restaurant. You could take your mother there and she'd be happy. My parents went there. My mother, his mother had died and left him a little money so they could go out and do those sorts of things. They were living in Damariscotta, they moved to Maine too. So the whole family moved to Maine, pretty much, even my brother. My father got him a job, he got a job in Casco Bay. Anyway, the owner of the Stowe house seemed like a reasonable enough younger guy, he had fired maybe eight or nine women servers with the idea that we were going to hire these young Bowdoin guys with black aprons and "I'll be your waiter tonight" kind of thing. So they were, it was a move to kind of enhance their image. Somehow one of the group members, the Landa Gay Women's Group, I think now it's just called Landa because there was enough guys. We found out about it, somebody found out about it, and one thing we had, which was wonderful and served us, it was the best thing we ever had, was an electric mimeograph machine. [laughter] that was owned by Meriam Diack, she's great, she's living in Seattle, I just saw her on CBS morning news, she's, she was bi, she was living with this guy that collects crystals the size of your room, and the story was, they got this huge warehouse full of crystals that are the size of mastodons, and they are trying to unload it to a museum, everybody is not too keen on it. So anyway, Meriam had the mimeograph so someone again, wasn't me, they whipped off a whole ton of flyers and the top headline was "Boycott the Stowe House" and underneath were the reasons why. We had signs we carried on sticks, we started picketing. We talked to the guy first and asked him to reverse his decision that was horribly, horribly unfair and just sexist and everything else you can think of, probably classic and it was economically oppressive. He said no, we said well, we're going to picket you. And by golly we did, in the rain, and sun, and there was always somebody there. The pickett started at five and went until maybe seven, that was our busy time. We'd just walk around in a slow, sort of squashed circle off their property.

Wendy: How many of you were there?

Peter: Maybe eleven or twelve, you know. Steven, me, all of the women, Susan, Wendy, their kids sometimes would come, and it was a laid back town at the time and this was very controversial at the time but nobody really knew what was going on. Because no one reads the flyer, you know. It was our first political, my first political activity and I'm sure I can say it for others that was their first. It went on all summer, one time my parents drove up. I handed my father a flyer and my mom, they were really, they smiled and took it. They were really good, they would later subscribe to the gay publication that I did and make donations. They were, you

know, I mean they probably rolled their eyes when I wasn't looking but they were supportive to me. Um, the guy finally ended up hiring the waitresses back, the same women, and he paid them back pay.

Wendy: Oh my goodness.

Peter: Yeah, we're sorry about the guys, you know you had fun, you got to wear your apron, but you should not have been there. Anyway so that was our first thing, that wasn't really "gay." I should mention at first when the women waitresses found out that a bunch of queers were supporting them, they didn't know how to react to that at first. But after they met us and spoke especially to Wendy and Susan and Steven and Stan, they all came around. So nice solidarity throughout the remainder of pickett. So the next endeavor, winning friends and influencing people involved the Freedom Train and that was in 1976 when the Bicentennial, not our next one, but this is, I should mention this, in between there was this symposium and other stuff was going on really gay and lesbian related things but I should mention the Freedom Train pickett, it started out in Burlington Vermont and it was a train with no people but displays and exhibits of what you might imagine. Mostly corporate sponsored about you know, the "freedoms of America" and I'm doing air quotes for freedoms. And so again, we plugged in the mimio, and cranked out a flyer and I remember the headline, it said "do not get on this train!" you know [laughter] we had a million reasons not to. So this was a little dicey, this was down on Commercial Street where the train was parked and it was at night, so it wasn't the greatest neighborhood. People show up, drinking, you know we actually had some very negative comments and physical threats at the time. I was less involved with that, but it was obviously gay men and lesbians, at that point people figured out what was going on.

Wendy: How was it obvious?

Peter: Well, we were, you know, we, well, it wasn't obvious to everyone, thank you for pointing that out, but they called us "fags" so somehow they figured it out. Some guys, you didn't have to think or guess to hard just the way they were dressed and some of the women. So that was the first time the pickett train, well, the second stop, it was the first picketting of the Freedom Train and it made the New York Times, we got a little teeny blurb, "Freedom Train Picketed" in Portland, Maine. And so from that point on, the train got picketted. It was going across the whole country. Next stop was Boston, so they were ready, you know [laughter].

Wendy: Was it gay focused picketters all the way across the country, or?

Peter: I don't know about that, ours was. We had some people from, there was a prison reform group, I forget their name, but there was a prison reform group in Maine that had rattled the establishment. Three or four of them were there too, they were really supportive and wonderful people. But it was pretty much a gay, lesbian thing.

Wendy: Can you just say a little bit, what it was you were protest- I mean, so you put freedom in quotes, so was there a particular..?

Peter: It had John Wane's, you know you know caboots, and, we thought it was a diversion from what was really needed and it was 1976, we were in a very sharp recession. Unemployment was very high, uh, and, we thought this was a distraction from what needed to be talked about. I mean, we were out there, I'll be honest, I'd have to read the flyer to see what, you know.

Wendy: It sounds like you were a fairly successful activist, you were organizing things that got attention and had effects.

Peter: Thank you, this was good. It gave us solidarity and it gave us a sense of what we could do. It fired us up.

Wendy: So can we go back for just a minute?

Peter: Sure.

Wendy: You talked about the symposium, were you involved with planning that or did you go to it?

Peter: No, actually, the first symposium I didn't attend because I had to work that weekend and there was no way you know, I would have lost my job if I hadn't shown up with lobsters, so I did miss that. I was at the second one, but at that point I had been to Bangor, had been to UMO and met the Wilde-Stein people, and now groups were, after the symposium in '74, this was two years before the Freedom Train thing, groups just started forming. That was one of the great results of the symposium was people realized there were five other individuals from their area here. Suddenly there were, we had, in our little gay publication we were constantly expanding the list, you know, it took a whole page and there were some groups that were a little suspect to me, like maybe one or two people, but yeah, no, that was great. There were gay groups all over the state by 1975, a year after the symposium. But no, I was not involved in that.

Wendy: So when did Mainely Gay start?

Peter: Okay, in 1973, I believe, again, this was the creative result of the Brunswick group called Lambda, and Lambda is the Greek letter of course. I forget the significance, but anyway, um, they had decided to do a publication. So I showed up in Brunswick and you know the trustee mimeograph that was put into operation and people wrote articles and um, it was really fun. It was maybe three or four legal size sheets of paper stapled up in the corner, top corner, had a nice little "Maine Gay", we had a Maine Gay task force, that really scared a lot of people. And uh, we had a nice logo and then everything else was type written on stencils in those plastic stencils you know with plastic shards falling everywhere. You know we ruined many rented electric typewriters, trying to bang through six stencils at once. I may be wrong here, but that

was in the fall of '74, the first issue came out. Our first article, and it was the main item on the front page, there was a protest against one of the TV networks for one of the really bad dramas where queers were vilified. And then, we had this really sweet editorial on page 2 written by Sandy Swain who I adored, and the title was "What the Fuck is Unity" [laughter] you know, inch and a half letters. And I thought, "you know, I'm gonna like this paper" and she wrote this rather sureberal, essay, on why we need to all be together.

Wendy: So you were not involved at that point?

Peter: No. I didn't even know about this, I hate to say this, my grandmother had died, she left me a thousand dollars in her will. I went to London to visit Charlie Grindall who I think has done an oral, and his boyfriend, so I was in London for a month and they didn't like that at the Lobster Pound, but too bad. By that time they wanted me to come back, I had been a good worker. So when I came back from London, I drove up to Brunswick and here's the first issue coming off the press. I thought that was really just great, I loved it. We didn't even put a date on it. We didn't even know if there was going to be another one, but it was well receieved by the queer cognicenty, as tiny as it was at the time. And just everybody who was supportive, of, you know it was a good thing to do, you needed to do grass roots. You gotta have information, it is important to point out that back then, the only way you could communicate was on the phone. And that was expensive. It was AT&T, you made a phone call to Bangor at nine o'clock in the morning, it was prime time so it was much better to have a publication where we could have dates of upcoming. It was the only way to spread the news, and Maine is a big state so the newsletter really filled a void. Again, I was able to draw on, I liked English when I was in school, I was able to draw on my experience with spelling. I am a crossword nut today, just a nut.

Wendy: So did you write for Mainely Gay?

Peter: Finally, oh yeah. The newsletter attracted those who wanted something to do with it and I was one of those and there was maybe seven or eight of us who really wanted to do this, that was plenty. Plus there were people who sent stuff in, we lightly edited, we want people to say what they want. We wouldn't print crap from negative opponents. But we didn't get much of that. Again, this was in '74 and it's important to note that this is before Jerry Faulwell, this is before Christians went crazy, this is before a lot of things and we were operating pretty much unopposed. Here and there would be homophobic people popping up, but there was no, what you would call, organized opposition like there is today. Like there has been for decades. Back in the seventies this was such a novelty, that the opposition had not collected into a form to oppose us. That would change, but we were probably fortunate. Of course on the flip side of the coin of course, we had no supporters either. [laughter] Media was kind of "ehhhh.." and the churches except for the UVU's were the same way. We had no, the only people who seemed to really care were civil liberties people, and that's my memory anyway. I could be wrong I don't mean to slight any groups or individuals, but we didn't have many allies. Often it was a pat on the back, "i'd love to support you" type of thing, we all know. So yeah, that was the setting at the

time. A lot of, the economy was not good. There was a lot of anxiety that we say or feel today, for instance, I don't, but I guess it's out there.

Wendy: One of the things that was happening during that period was the second wave of the Women's Movement, and I'm guessing giving your first activity was you know, a solidarity action with women being fired that there were alliances being made with feminists? Self-identifying feminists?

Peter: Yes, so, the interesting, so this is important, thank you Wendy, for bringing that up. An important facet of our political organizing was the men in the Brunswick group were very much influenced by feminist women. And here is me, suburban kid, I have got no clue, and, but, when I heard the argument, you know what, that perfectly made sense. It wasn't hard to do but I had to work on it, I got rid of hopefully sexist language in my own life and really thought we all needed this together and rights of women are just as important as anyone else's rights. So we were very, and that actually caused a split in the state later between mostly men and other groups that weren't fortunate enough to have the influence of strong women who have strong opinions and so that was very important and to this day I am grateful that I was able to at least be exposed to a feminist point of view. And it's funny to see the society in fits and starts, kind of adopt a less entitled, women attitude over the years or so it seems. And you know my sister, she is a strong feminist, she just kind of evolved into it, nobody grabbed her and said "look you idiot" not that they did that to me, but I got a good strong dose and that was good, that's what I needed.

Wendy: Do you remember how that split between the feminist L and G at least groups, how they divided from others? An example?

Peter: Steve Bull is very well versed on that, I wasn't really paying attention. I knew it happened, and that was one reason, well not a reason, sorry, that there became kind of a little tension. That people from southern Maine were seen as "out there" and the rest of the state, they were the, you know, "true", i'm not being mean here or facetious, you know, I understand their point. They just thought we were just strident, overly strident. No one ever stood up and said "you people shouldn't be strident," it started to kind of seep in. That may have been a reason for events down the road happening or not happening, again I was in my little bubble, I didn't know what was going on, really.

Wendy: So how long did you work on Mainely Gay?

Peter: Oh, gosh. Okay, so, we have the newsletters put out and it was printed in Brunswick, then Meriam, she, it was Karen Frank, I'm glad I can mention her name, she was heterosexual, but she was a member of the Gay Women's Group initially. When I first heard, incidentally, they did consciousness raising, that was their thing, not necessarily activism. And uh, so she was with them and it was her house, I believe where all of this was taking place. So we thought, you know, we need not to be imposing, you know, anymore on her. So the operation was moved

down to Portland. And we actually got, we rented a little, a nice office room at 193 Middle Street in Portland, on the second floor. Our immediate neighbors, in the room over were NCLU, there was a lawyer who was still doing TV ads, he owned the building. And he was real liberal, and he liked to have us in there. We had this office at 193 and at one point, I wish I had a photograph, it was broken before I could photograph it, but we coughed up 25 bucks all the groups, and got our name on the glass door, and it was "Maine Gay Task Force" and "Maine Civil Liberties Union" blah blah blah, and I thought, "Oh, Jesus, this is like a milestone" and it wasn't broken by a rock from a homophobe, the janitor fell through it drunk one night. And that was the end of it, we couldn't afford another, a little burst of vanity. Anyway, there we were, my father's camp had closed, but there is lots of furniture around. So we got two desks from the forties, painted them pink, hot bubblegum pink, put them in the room, and you know, we had some other furniture, hardly inappropriate, which we liked for a foreign office setting. But that was our office it was really nice. Talk about a safe space. That was where we did the newsletter, we did the newsletter for maybe one or two, well at least two years called the MGTF newsletter. [00:49:30.11]And then I think it was Stan Fortuna, he was always thinking, he had a great, well he still does, he has a fabulous brain, great brain, and he's just always thinking. You could just look at him and you'd see his mind going, and he says, "we need to change the name" and uh, we talked about it and said okay, because MGTF newsletter was not full, dry, what have you. So, heaven help us. Well, I never use "heaven help us" so it must be the coffee. Um, we came up with Mainely Gay, and it might have been Stan, and Stan if you're listening, I'm sorry sweetie, but, I think it might have been you who came up with this. But anyway, it was voted and we liked it. At the time, this was forty-five years ago, you know, but we minigated that error, no not an error, it was cute, I liked it, we used "hobo font" so we were kind of goofy. Again, Stan came up with it. He streamlined the process, he got us an electronic stencil cutter from USM, they were ditching theirs and we got it for like twenty bucks. So now, we could kind of, in a really crappy way, reproduce photos, drawings, and this was like, cutting edge of high tech back in '75. And what we would do, was go to a printer, like Kinkos, and print off our cover. It was usually nice art, and the cover included the ad for the back of the publication, get that printed professionally. And then the mimeograph, may it rest in peace wherever it is, printed off a shitload of the center pages. And we didn't care how big it was, we just printed what came in. And I think, you know, the issues were never small, I mean we didn't print, you know, crappy stuff it was all relevant, but everybody had something to say, and it was just really cool. Um, and we had just a wide range of contributers with a wide range of interests, but all gay-related.

Wendy: Can you remember any story that you particularly, sticks with you these forty-five years later, or, you know, if you don't, don't worry.

Peter: No, no, I'm sure the million stories, again, my poor brain is seventy-one. Um..

Wendy: Was there anything that ended up being controversial that you had to deal with?

Peter: Uh, not really. We were not- there was a freedom of speech issue here and most everybody realized that so we never got any grief for putting that out for anyone. Um, but what

was kind of interesting, we had people subscribe, and oh, we ran an ad. This is good, here's a little story. Um, we wanted to put an ad, I think this was the newsletter then, before we morphed into Mainely Gay, in the Portland Press Herald. So Stan and I, he always had a checkbook. And just getting checks printed with Maine Gay Task Force on it, you know, was not easy. And then spending the checks downtown was not easy. Clerks would look at the check, and they'd disappear [laughter]. You know, anyway, um --

Wendy: The power of the word "gay?"

Peter: Yes, yes, yes! So we were not far from Guy Ganite headquarters. So Stan and I, we were always on our high horse. We went over there, went to the classified, we wanted a display ad, okay. And, we went up to the counter and, you know, the clerk looked like, you know, motor vehicles, it was one of those things, you know, we've seen everything, heard everything. But when she saw our ad, like the guy with the check, she disappeared too. And came back in five minutes and said oh, we're sorry, we can't do this. Now that's not words that Stan in particular, is accustomed to hearing. I'm like, "well, we tried" [laughter] you know. Stan, no, he wants to talk to the publisher now. So phone calls, and the next thing we know, we're on the elevator, going to the top floor. And again, not because we were special or anything, we were just "different" and we're new, and people really, you know, "two fags want to run an ad down in classified? Let's see who they are! Let's see what they look like!" you know, they were curious. So we, a lot of doors opened, just because of straight people's curiosity, back in the day. And uh, so here we are, sitting in this plush, you know, back in the glory days, of newspapers. And, a guy sits there, rocks way back in his chair, and he puts his feet up to show, that he's you know, solidarity with us you know, just wants to really help us. He goes "well, okay, we'll run it. We'll run it in the uh, automotive air. Stan says, "no, no, no. We want it in the Maine Sunday Telegram in the family section" [laughter]. Now the guys' feet come off the desk, the guy is all serious, he looks at it, and he says "okay, I believe, I'm not positive here, but I want to see a copy of it" before they make further commitment. So I think we had to rush a copy over, you know, like okay, you're in. So anyway, there it is, the next Sunday, "subscribe to Maine Gay Task Force newsletter!" blah blah blah blah blah, and just a little blurb, news of the community, nothing. So, we got lots of subscriptions. It was four bucks a year, a new copy came out mostly every month. For quite a few years, every month. And uh, we had about 350 to 400 subscribers in state, quite a few out of state, we had one guy in Iran, and that was a really difficult thing to post office, but we did send him one. There were a couple in Canada, and also another thing Wendy, we did, which I love, because I'm a reader and I love to read out of state stuff to see what's going on around the country or world. We started exchanging, with other gay publications. Which by '75, pretty much all of the big cities had one or two, um, medium sized cities had one usually, um, and sometimes even small rural states. There was a publication out of Kansas, called Yellow Brick Road. It only lasted two issues but we loved exchanging with them. But we exchanged with everybody, uh, we had like, maybe seventy publications coming into our mailbox every month, from all around the country. In Toronto, there was a gay publication out of Toronto, so we were like the readers' digest of news coming in. You know, we had a page "news from around" or news...whatever you called it. And, uh, you know, we had this great resource. You know,

queers! Writing stuff, and we liked it, hey, we'll just reproduce the whole article. We were not sensitive to copyrights. And uh, you know, anyway also what we did, was we would send, we would send a hundred copies every month to the bookstore in New York in Greenwich Village, um, Oscar Wilde memorial bookshop, we sent copies there, we sent copies to a bookstore in Philly, copies to a store in Boston. And, uh, that was pretty much our major out of state...We had a good postage bill. But we mailed it at bulk rate, you know. You go down, I'd be mailing it, I'd go into the post office here on Forest Avenue, and we got our bulk permit. You know there's no problem with that, Maine Gay Task Force. But the guy behind the counter in the subterranean bulk mailing area, first thing you notice when you walked in to see him, he had a big blue and white holy cross banner on the wall [laughter]. And he was a man of few words, and one thing you couldn't do, bulk mailing, you couldn't have any inserts, it just had to be, everything had to be identical and there were no inserts, there were no personal letters stuck in the envelope. So to check that, he would slice open, at random, you know, three or four, and we had maybe like you know, five hundred copies. I did a shitload of, you know, a big box, maybe two boxes sometimes and you know, I'm thinking, "we can't send this to the people, their going to get their, these are farmers in Buxton and their going to get their Mainely Gay with uh, opened?!" So I said, I need to have those back, we will send those first class, which we ended up doing. And um, that was kind of fun. But you know, he was rude the whole time, he was just rude anyway. Who knows, that was the little vignette.

Wendy: So you continued to do Mainely Gay for a few years?

Peter: Yeah, yeah. So the newsletter morphed with Stan's creative direction into Mainely Gay, and now we were kind of getting the hang of things. You know, I knew how to run the mimio, I could get it up to top speed, and it was really spitting out, you know this thing was really a work horse. And we would go and buy legal sized paper, we didn't use white, we used colored. And if they ran out of blue, we'll take red. If you don't have red, we'll take yellow. And then, you know, twice of year we'd have a whole ton of different colored paper we didn't even use and we would do an issue with just, as it came. And so, we were, we had fun. A guy, a gay guy donated, in '74, he gave us a brand new, top of the line, IBN selectric printer. These were, I mean, not every business had one of those. It had a carriage that went forever, you could just put yourself in there and you could turn it. It was just wonderful. We had all kinds of fonts, we had big ass letters, and the little ones, script, and backwards, so we had fun with that. And uh, at one point we even changed from black ink to purple ink. And uh, it was really good, we really felt that we were changing the world, as that mimio swirled around, you know what I mean? And then you had something concrete and real in your hand and you know it didn't look bad? And we had, Tim Bouffard was a wonderful, wonderful illustrator and he, the stuff he did, I mean it was really too good for our publication [laughter]. He should have been in a big city doing that, but we really, we did appreciate it and Tim was lovable, he was a really sweet guy. It was, anyway, to answer your question, what happened was, you know and this was true, over the years people move on. They have, you know, their lives change and good old me, my life never changed. Well it does, but not then. And I was still drinking, so I could, Christ I could have a six pack and keep that thing going until three in the morning right? And, I never got so drunk that I would

mess up, but just kind of, that little spot where you know "this is alright..." and uh, so, the collective, if you want to call it that, the people that worked on the, at this point, Mainely Gay. I think the newsletter went two years then changed it's name to Mainely Gay. The newsletter started in I think '73 or '74 and the last issue of Mainely Gay was, at that point we were doing it every two months. And that was January February of '80. That was the last issue, and that was also, not coincidentally, uh, very, not long after, when I sobered up. And I sobered up around Thanksgiving, not by choice, '79. So it'll be forty years this November that I have not been addicted to alcohol, well I still am, but not using.

Wendy: Can you say a little about why? What prompted you in '79 to go, at Thanksgiving to go, "I'm done."?

Peter: You know, uh, I had tried to stop. I'm glad you asked, thank you Wendy. I tried to stop drinking, it was getting bad, and uh, I was starting to get depressed and suicidal and I started to have dreams that were amazingly vivid. Where I'd be knifed, and I could feel the knife going in, I could feel the organs snapping, I could feel the warm blood. I mean, this is how vivid the dreams were. And I think I was like half awake at the time, so it would make it even more real. But that was just one thing, I just, I had enough, and I couldn't do it. I just said "you know what? you really need to take your life, or you need to sober up." That's it. There's no middle ground here. Now, this is great because I can mention a dear dear friend. A year before that, Janice Mencini, she was known as, at the time, Janice had come to Portland, lesbian, and she went to a dance at USM, they had dances there in the seventies. Um, in '77 and 8 I think. And I grabbed her ass at one of the dances and she really flew around, about to deck me, and I was smiling. She's like "ugh, God, just another drunk idiot" but anyway, we became friends, good friends. And of course, she saw me as someone who really really really needed guidance here. And so, she'd hit me over the head with a two by four, got my attention and next thing you know we are in my Volkswagen that I bought for a dollar from a friend. And we were going to AA meetings all over Portland. This was before there were gay meetings. And I learned to really enjoy second-hand smoking in church basements. And that's where I started drinking coffee, because sometimes, these guys, particularly drone on and on and I said "oh, Jesus, I gotta go get a coffee" you know, "I'll drink anything just to stand up and leave." So I got into coffee, so thank you AA for that addiction. And uh, she really was, if it weren't for Janice, I wouldn't be sitting her today. I doubt I'd be sitting anywhere else, maybe in jail, for hitting some family, you know. Uh, anyway, she was, she was really a sweetie. She died, um, ten years ago. But that's, I had some fits and starts, my first AA meeting was in dry mills Maine, and I went about five days and then I was drinking again. But then Thanksgiving morning of '79, she was coming over for dinner, I was living with Susan Henderson, and I woke up, as usual I peed in the bed, and my cat, I always could tell that the mattress was going to be cold and wet because the cat was always up on the pillow. And here's, Susan knocked on the door and said, "Peter, they're coming in forty minutes." And I look around, you know, and there's a Boone's Farm, I'm sorry to say, you know, I would say now a half full bottle of Boon's Farm next to my mattress on the floor. And I was just a wreck, a mess, and totally susceptible to anything you wanted to tell me, but I didn't know if it made sense, but just tell me. So she grabbed me, I went to another meeting, probably my fifth

or sixth meeting ever, in Westbrook again, church, basement, smoke, guys droning on. And somebody said, the speaker said, "So, who here wants a white chip?" and I'm like, I'm really fucked up. But not high, or anything, I'm just hungover. Janice just jammed the shit out of me with her elbow, and I just staggered up, you know, and everybody almost, you know it was horror in the room like this poor guy, look how, oh my God, he's so fucked up. And I got my white chip, and that was it. Something happened, maybe it was Thanksgiving you know, or God knows what. But I was able to, with Janice's help, and that's important. So anyone who has that addiction, you can do it alone, but, you don't have to, I forget the cliche, but it's always good to have someone help you. And she was just, she was a strong feminist. She didn't take any shit from anybody. She was cool.

Wendy: So did that take precedence over doing, you mentioned the newspaper had closed...

Peter: Yes, well, you know okay at this point the collective had dwindled to pretty much me. And so, I had been doing it now, we were still getting, people were still writing. If we were open, we would open up the publication and it would look like it was put out by throngs of doodies. But it was just me, pretty much the last two years. And uh, it got to be a drag, it was no longer fun. The only thing that kept me going, you know, a lot of guilt from alcohol. But I also had a lot of guilt that this is too important, it might have been a sense, you know, a grandiose sense or something, personal I don't know. But I didn't want to be the one that's you know, held the last rights to this publication when it really had a nice run. And uh, but, Janice convinced me, she said, "you know what? It's time for others." And, like this huge lightbulb went off in my head and I said, "yes, it is time for others." In the last issue, she got her lesbian friends, they all came over and we had an envelope stuffing party, we got it all done in like two hours, instead of two days with me alone. And then, that was it. I think I typed up a note and sent it to the subscribers, you know. I forget what it said, but you know, that was that. And it ended, and um, we all, it was good, it was probably just right that it happened, you know.

Wendy: Around the same time, I'm looking at some notes that you sent Stan, around the same time it looks like the state was involved and trying to pass a gay rights measure of some sort?

Peter: Oh, right.

Wendy: Were you involved in that?

Peter: Very much so.

Wendy: So can you talk about that? It says here that it was 1977.

Peter: Yes, and I verified that with Lois Reckon just recently, because I wasn't sure. And, uh, the genesis for, you know we always talked about a gay rights bill, you know, when we were having coffee. But we had no idea how to go about it or anything. But Lois, Reckon, she had the brains and she had the information on how to get a bill in the legislature. She was with NOW, and I'm

sure they had many, they probably opposed bills and submitted bills on behalf of women. So you know, they were somewhat versed in how the legislature works. And I believe it was Lois, and I'm sure some friends of hers whose names I don't know, they actually plotted how we were going to do this. The first thing we did was form a coalition and that was National Organization for Women. They were very much into it, there was the Maine Gay Task Force, Maine Lesbian Feminists, and Maine Civil Liberties Union. We actually, we mimeographed a letterhead and we kind of looked around to see who would sponsor the bill and up came a new, beautiful man. Larry O'Connelley. He was, the republicans, he was a representative, they probably thought he was a communist, he was so far left. And Jerry Towelette. A light skinned black guy, and I say light skinned because there is a story there. He was a rep from Portland as well, and we approached them as co-sponsors, went to their house, and they said "great, we will do this." And Jerry and the legislature, a lot of republican conservative guys thought he was a white guy. So they would come up to him in the legislature and tell him a racist joke. He was on board, just, he was great. They both were. I really loved them both. This was something only they could have done. They had safe seats, and even their democratic allies probably rolled their eyes like "Jerry, what's going on here?" you know, "you're just getting too...out there" so anyway, they, the bill, and this is the first gay rights bill. Actually the first around the country. It was, the bill sought to amend the Maine Human Rights Act, which just had been passed a few years earlier. The conservative hated that, you know now it's going to be amended for the queers, I mean, imagine how they felt. And uh, it was going to amend the Maine Human Rights Act to include sexual orientation for all of the basic areas: credit, housing, job stuff. So that was, that got the ball rolling, and Jerry introduced the bill. I happened to be a member of the Haymarket Peoples Fund. I was a, they had boards in all six green states and I was one of the members. I had gone to the meetings, I was a member there, they were into organized: grass roots, fund you only if you can grass roots and get people organized. I thought that was great, you know. They are not going to buy you a car so you can drive around and organize but they'll give you the money to get on the phone. And uh, so they gave us money to pay lobbyists, which is unheard of, and there is a slight conflict of interest I was one of the lobbyists and the other two, I believe Steven Leo and Nan Stone. And we lobbied three days a week in Augusta, um, and we had, we would just go up to somebody who had a name tag and just say "excuse me, can I talk to you for a minute?" And you know we didn't care who they were, we'd talk to anybody. And as it turned out, again, we were so unusual, they would talk to us! You know, even the most homophobic, crazy, right-wing republican, they had never seen a queer in their life. They had certainly never seen an out queer. And they didn't know any, not in their family. So this was like, really remarkable. We had great entrees into everywhere, I went into John Martin who was a speaker, and I knocked on his door. He didn't know who the hell I was, I said, "hey, I'm lobbying for this gay rights bill, what are you going to suggest?" And you know, he gave me all of the things. And so you know, anyway that was fun. Well no, that wasn't fun that was arduous. But it was somewhat gratifying. At the time, Olympia Snow was a state rep from Auburn, and I didn't like her when I first, she just kind of looked like a sour personality. Anyway she told Larry O'Connelley, she did not want to be lobbied by a lesbian, *gasp*, so Steven, he was our good looking guy. With the doe eyes, he was really very cute, we had her... You know, I got to know

the second floor of the capitol really well, I got a haircut, I was like a, kind of, krypto-hippie at the time. We lobbied for like three months, and we knew we weren't going to win.

Wendy: Did you have really outspoken opposition?

Peter: Not really.

Wendy: So, legislators that didn't support it weren't really...

Peter: No, they would say, "oh, I can't support that." and "thank you for your time, it was fun talking with you." And then after the novelty of the queers wore off, they would kind of brush us off as we approached them. We knew, at some point we had every senator and representative, we had notes. "might support, might not" you know, typical classic lobbying. And uh, there was a public hearing for the bill and that was set for a room in the basement of the state house. And we had really organized this, Lois again, big pat on the back for this. We had Frank Cammedy who died about ten years ago, big obituary in the New York Times. He was a real, he was a pioneer back in the day when there were very few pioneers. He came up, I think Haymarket, we got the money from them to pay his bus fare from Washington, and he kind of droned on to hearing, here's a name, we liked him we loved him, he was great. We had speakers, we had maybe ten speakers that addressed the bill and you know again, it was half women, half men. We were very inclusive, this was coming from what we had learned up in Brunswick. If you wanna win, you need all heard. You know, so we had a really big public hearing, it had to be moved to a larger meeting spot. And then, Jerry, I don't know if he was a chair, I think he was a Justice in civil rights sub-committee who was hearing the bill. He may or may not have been the chair but he announced, "okay, are there any opposition?" There was none. And this was a room of like four hundred people and there were none. And some guy went up and whispered to Jerry, and Jerry said we will take a ten minute break. The guy went off and found Jack Wyman, who is a fundamentalist minister. Democratic representative from I believe central Maine, a town in central Maine. Of course, he was ready to stick against it. So he got up there and he said "well I'm here on short notice" and blah blah blah, so he, mostly it was you know, biblical prohibition stuff we heard. But I don't know if swayed any folks on the committee. And I think the committee, gave it ought to pass, or it might have been divided. I don't know what the democratic and republican split was then, but they didn't just kill it right then and there which they could have just done. So it went to the House for a four vote. I remember I was there for that, I was in the balcony up in the House. Oh, the Senate, I don't know if they ever ended up, I think it got lost in the House so I don't think the Senate ever took a vote but I need to say, Gerald Connelly was a Senate majority leader, no relation to Larry. They spell their names differently. He was just right for us. You know, having the majority leader, of the Senate, you know, that was cool. And uh, again, it never got to him but he was a great ally. Anyway, here's the vote and before they vote they are going to give speeches. And we had, there were two representatives from Westbrook who were really really really homophobic and just bad people. One of them got up and started snearing into his mic, and at that point, speaker John Martin clears the balcony of school kids because they are not sure what they are going to hear, their

tender ears. I wasn't sure what I was going to hear either at that point. So I had a debate and most people didn't say anything, it was really just the motivated homophobes and the motivated people in favor of the bill. And there were a few surprises, you know, mostly women no surprise there. A few republicans from towns like Damriscotta and Machias, they would get up and say "I know this bill is not going to pass, but I support it in principle." And that was really nice. The final vote was not bad, out of 151 representatives, it fell 95 to whatever the balance is. It wasn't a horrible route, but it was strongly defeated [laughter] so we took that as a moral victory. And it truly was, a moral victory. And there was a little footnote, I'm probably going to tear up, um, when I say this, um. Yesterday, Lois, she got the speaker of the House, I was in the balcony, and she says, you could have your dog recognized if you wanted, but it was still very sweet. They were doing their opening business, you know, the house chambers full, and she says, "okay, and bangs her gavel. We want to recognize in the balcony, Peter Prizer from Disney, Arizona, he was the, one of the first lobbyists for the first LGBT bill," and everybody stood up and turned around, and applauded. Democrats "woo'd" and cheered and all of this. I was real, I was, but now, I was just standing there I couldn't even look I was like (mumbling).. But it was so sweet, it was really nice of Lois, it was so sweet of her to do that. And um, anyway, the circle came full, for me.

Wendy: That's a really lovely story.

Peter: I really thank Lois, she's really a sweetheart.

Wendy: You mention in your notes to Stan that at least one of you got propositioned when you were doing the lobbying. Can you talk a little bit about that?

Peter: Sure, exactly. This will put a sparkle in my eye. Yes, Steven, he was again, he was really cute. There was this young guy, I don't know if he was a democrat or a republican from Richmond, probably a very conservative area I don't know how he got elected, he was a democrat but he and Steven went beyond just a face-to-face lobbying and started seeing each other and on the day of the vote, this poor guy, oh he was so brave, this poor representative from Richmond, he stood up, and with his voice cracking, he says, "we really need to support this, this is the right thing" he didn't come out, I don't believe, but it was obvious to anyone, even the missing school children figured out, you know, that this was a personal issue. And then, low and behold even myself, there was a democratic guy from Bangor, and I won't mention his name because I can't remember it, and he came up to me and he says "hey, uh, let's go up to the bell tower, let's mess around" and I was flattered and all, he was very sweet, about thirty years older than me, I try to be ageist, but you do notice some things. I had to say no, you know, and uh, that was the only story I was aware of. Oh yeah, thank you Wendy, one thing I did notice, a lobbying, it seemed to be, I can't tell with women as well, but I have a pretty good radar for male closet cases. It started dawning on me, there is a high percentage of men here who are in the closet in this legislature. I started using my half-ass armchair psychology and I thought, you know what it is? These people, and it's kind of my theory today, they probably don't have the greatest self-esteem because they are in the closet, but they have big ego's. So the big ego

gets them to run for office and that's how they end up there, and I think that being in office kind of litigates the low self esteem. That's my take on the attraction of a political career for guys.

Wendy: Did you notice that across the aisle that there were closeted gay republicans and --

Peter: Oh God, yeah. It didn't matter, didn't matter.

Wendy: Well on another issue, you mentioned that you wanted to talk about employment and education, could you say something about those two things?

Peter: I just wanted to say, thank you Wendy, that was just, you know, again, I wasn't really thinking, I just wanted to mention that I had a good education and that I worked on the waterfront. I covered that, that's pretty much-

Wendy: Sounds like you went to USM?

Peter: Oh, I went to USM and got a, whatever they get, a BA in political science. And Richard Mayman was teaching there, and a few others, and that was great. Of course I was drinking though, throughout. Except for the last semester, I was sober for that. That was good. Um, yeah, that was run. I was always interested in politics, so it wasn't hard. Just incidentally, going to USM I took a couple history electives because I figured you know, I could do history and drink. You can't do calculus and drink okay, I learned that in high school. And uh, so, I got into, I turned into a real, almost as bad as crossword puzzles, I love history. I took so many history electives that when I got my degree I started getting junk mail from the history department saying "oh, you qualify for a minor in history, send us $200 and..." anyway, I never did, to this day, I probably buy five or six books, historical books a year, I'm reading the, it's a cliche now, but I'm reading the Alexander Hamilton book, which is excellent. So anyway, I have a warm spot for USM.

Wendy: But you never did anything professionally with political science? You worked at the Lobster Pound and as a tractor driver, and then...

Peter: And then... What did I do? And then I actually got a job, after the lobster pound I stopped drinking so I could kind of focus a little and I worked making fake teeth in a dental lab here in Portland. They'd send you photographs, and it was kind of cool. We had these horrible smokers and they'd lose a tooth in the front, but guess what, they smoke so all of the other teeth are yellow and brown and hideous. So we had to match that with yellow and brown and yuck. Anyway I did that for a year and then again, my dear friend Janice was in the HR department at Maine Medical Center. And Honey, Gladys, we were always hang out together and she said "you should come work at Maine Med" and I said, "okay!" and uh, so I was there and I started out in the housekeeping department mopping up snow and slush and mud off the ER floor, third shift. That was an eye opener. Then I was truly truly truly, well I've always been grateful for not drinking but you start seeing people coming in with heads through a windshield then I realized

how damn lucky I was. Every night was an AA meeting for me to see what was really out there. So I ended up in the lab, I loved housekeeping but there wasn't really a future, financially so they trained me, I applied for a job in the lab, back then they still trained people. Now you gotta show up with your degree and your knowledge, but then they would train you and I was there probably from '82 to when I left for Arizona in '98 and I was kind of a half-ass med tech. I didn't have any, I didn't know electrolytes were, I was a political science major. I could tell you all about you know, the Constitution, doctors would call up and say "potassium levels 4.2" when I'd answer the phone and I'd say, well, what do you think? That was a good career, it was a job, you had to show up for, a lot of nice people, and I got a real good look at the under-belly of the medical biz in a somewhat benign form. So that was an education, you can see why we have such a horrible, horrible health care system today.

Wendy: Sorry, that was at the height of the AIDS epidemic during those years.

Peter: That's right, we had our first AIDS patient come in, and as we are aware now from people speaking, the first patients suffered horrible, horrible abuse. Not discrimination, abuse.

Wendy: In a medical setting?

Peter: In a medical setting. And God this is Maine, imagine in Alabama or Mississippi what they put up with. But eventually, you know, everyone got over it. I got the first tubes of blood coming into the lab, you know they were like sealed boxes and you had to put on double gloves. One woman on day shift, I didn't know her well, she actually cut herself and she died, died of AIDS. This was back in the early days of AIDS. So yeah it was real and a danger for sure. Then I moved to Arizona when I was fifty, a lot of very serendipitous way things came together or flew apart in my life. My sweetheart Maine Coon cat of 21 years died, had to euthanize him when I was 50 in '98. The job was starting to suck, they were starting to tighten up and do more work, it wasn't as fun as it used to be. That was a drag. Plus I always had a desire to see the rest of the country. Love Maine, absolutely adore Maine, even the sucky weather. But I thought, if I'm ever going to do this, I'm fifty, if I wait until I'm sixty I won't do it, I know myself. So I gave my notice, had a great apartment on lower State Street, threw all of my shit in the back of a really large uHaul, and drove out to Bithby, Arizona which I read about and visited a few times and thought yeah I could live here. I have been there ever since, and when I got out there, I did work in a local hospital because I needed a job and I worked there for five years and then when I was fifty-five, and I thought you know what? I'm going to do what I really like doing and that's painting. I have always like painting, walls, houses, you name it. It's therapeutic maybe, it centers me, and uh, so I started a little business called High Desert Painting, it was a pun, and word of mouth, I was really totally OCD so they loved my work and I used a Q-Tip just to make sure I got the paint in the crack perfectly. I was honest I didn't take shit out of their house when they were gone, so I actually had more business than I could handle and I was actually making more money which was okay and the shitty job that I had at the local copper queen hospital, sorry guys, I did that until the great recession and that was the end of my business. But happily, I was turning 62 [laughter]. Social security kicked in, you know, so anyway I still did jobs when I

could but there were very few. But I got by, I did my personal finances but it was all good, I did the house painting thing for five or six years and met a lot of nice people, some people I am still dear friends with, including their dogs, and um, turned out well.

Wendy: Sounds like a good life to me.

Peter: I've been lucky. You know Wendy, sometimes I sit in Bisby in my rocking chair, and you know, I've got my medical marijuana card, we have a doctor there, it's like Johnny Appleseed for marijuana, she wants you to have a card because it's so damn good for everything and you know I was kind of skeptical at first but I have a neighbor with Parkinsons and it's really helped him. I started to get educated, I do it recreationally, but that's not legal in Arizona but medical is. I was sitting there with a nice little buzz one day and I thought you know? Things have really worked out well for me. I don't terribly deserve it, and that's okay, I don't beat myself up anymore, you know, I could die tomorrow, I do need to write my obituary first though. No one else, I don't trust anyone else [laughter] to get all of the little dots dotted. So other than that I'm just really pleased. Oh this is kind of odd, this is important too for the oral history. When I moved to the house I'm in Bisbee Arizona, a little bumfuck town, 53 hundred feet high in the Southern Rockies, they're not even the Southern Rockies they are the Northern Sierra Madres coming out of Mexico and it's people who don't live there, come through and say "this is idyllic, this an eem" and they buy a house for $200,000 and they live in it for two months and then they realize there is no big box stores anywhere, you can't buy a pair of shoes anywhere, there is no dry cleaners, blah blah blah. Anyway, I love it there, and when I was moving back in '06 to my current house, this 18 year old kid just out of nowhere, I was struggling pushing my old motorcycle on a flat tire, and he came up and started helping me push it. And I said hey, do you want to earn some money? I'll pay you to help me move all of my shit. He said yeah! Long story shirt, turned out he had no father, his father had been abusive, probably worse than that, he had no male father figure, and he was eighteen. He just globed onto me, totally straight, totally straight. And the funny thing was, from the moment I met him, I liked him, he had a sense of humor, I respected him, and I don't know why I respect, I still do to this day. Anyway, he's lived with me on and off he'll go get jobs in Phoenix and come back, but he considers me his father. And here's me, kind of a fuck up, you know at times with the alcohol and things, and here I am at the end of life and here's this sweet straight guy that's come into my life and actually likes me and we live together, and I mean, I don't even joke, there's no gay jokes like "hey..." I don't, it's totally. And uh, it's the perfect match. It's just so sweet, and he is house sitting for me while I'm here in Maine doing wonderful things like this oral interview. So, anyway, unexpected end of life, helping somebody. Never expected that, it came right out of nowhere, and if I may pontificate just for a sec, I did learn something, if I want a food relationship, the bedrock foundation has to be respect. If I don't respect the other person, I don't care if I think they are the sexiest thing in the world, if they're funny, no, you've gotta have respect. And that goes, and that's what we don't see in the national dialogue. People don't respect for some reasons and I too in some cases but I mean, you know, that's what I've learned. I've came somewhat inadvertently into my head but it's been sweet, I really like that and I have two cats, adopted, in the Bisby shelter, and I have this old arts and crafts bungalow that I got for $80,000 I'm fixing it up and painting it really gay colors on the

inside. People come in and say "woah!" not the outside because I'll have to sell it someday, little less gay [laughter]. Anyway yeah so, thank you Wendy, things did turn out, you know, I don't know I could be in jail three years from now, but no, things did turn out they really did.

Wendy: Is there anything I didn't ask you about or anything you'd like people in the future listening to this to know?

Peter: No, if you've listened this far into it, my apologies [laughter] doesn't get any better, no. I think I pretty much yakked on and on, but thank you for the opportunity to bring up some memories and for the most part, great memories. And I really really thank you, Wendy, for that.

Wendy: And thank you for the contributions that you've made to making this place such a vibrant gay community.

Peter: Thank you, thank you, it was me and many many many others, it took all of us, and you know that, everybody knows that but I have to say it, I mean it is true. You can't do it alone, only you can do it - oh that's the AA cliche "only you can do it, but you don't have to do it alone, and that goes for the movement" [laughter].

Wendy: Thank you.